

English Literature II, Fall 2001  
Essay #2, due October 10, on:  
Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights

## The Frankenstein-Syndrome:

### Human Creation of Evil in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

#### *Introduction*

"I am Heathcliff," (Brontë, 84) Catherine Earnshaw says in Wuthering Heights, "[...] He's more myself than I am" (Brontë, 82). Famous sentences in Emily Brontë's gothic novel, that somehow - in connection with the whole plot - remind me of several incidents in Mary Shelley's

#### Frankenstein.

The major focus is directed on Wuthering Heights and thus Heathcliff. He will be in the centre of interpretative attention, and therefore all other considerations are depending or connected to him - also those about Shelley's Creature, which rather serves as literary evidence. Thus, the whole essay is supposed to be a characterization of Heathcliff and his personal influences. The ideas derived from former works and interpretations play an important role for any examinations, results and/or solutions proposed by the analysis given in this essay. The final question to be answered will be: Is Heathcliff only a creation of his social environment (like Frankenstein's Creature somehow was)?

#### *Heathcliff and his 'creators'*

Reading a couple of passages from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, one could imagine them also written by the hand of Emily Brontë. Their contents, their meanings, their effects - all seems to fit into the plot of Wuthering Heights as it does in Frankenstein. Good and Evil, creature and

creator(s), order and obey - issues that matter a lot in both gothic novels. *"You are my creator, but I am your master,"* (Shelley, 152) says the Creature. Heathcliff probably would never have said such a sentence, not recognizing that he is also a creature - a creature of his society, his environment. But who is the one who really is responsible for his embittered soul? *"He is introduced to us as being 'as dark almost as if he came from the devil',"* (75) John Allen Stevenson writes in his interpretation of Heathcliff's character. And indeed, everybody seems to be afraid of his appearance - and that is why Heathcliff wishes he *"had light hair and a fair skin"* (Brontë, 59). But that fear of him is one of the major facts that make Heathcliff behave so rude, so brutal, so unfeeling. Stevenson, mainly considering Catherine Earnshaw as the most influential person on him, also pays attention to his reactions on other people Heathcliff gets into contact with: *"But for this novel the more significant meaning of Heathcliff's indeterminate origins is not that he is free to define himself, but that every character he comes in contact with (and every reader) is forced to mark him with a meaning they give"* (69/70). Obviously, there are really a lot of 'Victors' in *Wuthering Heights*. Apart from Catherine, who of course plays the most significant part, in this essay there should be a focus on Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton participating in Heathcliff's 'creation'.

Hindley, being the eternal enemy of Heathcliff and having the only aim to get rid of him - by whatever means - represents the Victor Frankenstein of the end of Mary Shelley's novel. Old and despaired, Hindley tries again and again, to at least chase him away from Wuthering Heights, or to find a little reason to kill him: *"I cannot resist going up with this [a pistol] every night, and trying his door. If once I find it open, he's done for! [...] it is some devil that urges me thwart my own schemes by killing him [...]; when the time comes, not all the angels in heaven shall save him"* (Brontë, 138). And similar to this speaks Victor Frankenstein, while being on the final and deciding chase for the Creature. Like Hindley, Victor makes the destruction of his opponent to his last task and goal of his life:

*“I resolved not to fail in my purpose, and calling heaven to support me, I continued with unabated fervour to traverse immense deserts, until the ocean appeared at a distance and formed the utmost boundary of horizon. [...] I did not weep, but I knelt down and with a full heart thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety to the place where I hoped [...] to meet and grapple with him [the Creature].”* (Shelley, 189)

Victor and Hindley obviously developed a feeling of hatred and revenge, dominating their minds like the same feelings dominated the minds of their eternal enemies. They just react without thinking about reasons or consequences of their current situation and behavior. It is only hate, a deep aversion that determines their actions. Thoughts about how this is related to themselves do not come into their minds.

Edgar Linton, by the way, behaves completely different compared to Hindley or Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein. For him, any outbreak of emotions caused by Heathcliff is superfluous and not worth to waste lifetime for. So Edgar ignores him, and wants his closest friends and family members to do the same. In this context, Edgar appears a kind of egoistic, claiming that *“It is disgraceful, that she [Isabella] should own him as a friend, and force his company on me”* (Brontë, 113). For this intention, Edgar later even accepts that he and his sister Isabella *“are eternally divided”* (Brontë, 144) by her marriage with Heathcliff. Furthermore, the historical connection between the houses of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights quits. *“My communication with Heathcliff’s family [...] shall not exist,”* Edgar says. Stevenson describes this development as *“an explosion of social bonds, an explosion that does take place when he [Heathcliff] elopes with Isabella”* (77), and finally continues his statement, *“That exogamous ‘crime’ at once destroys the internal harmony of the Lintons, [...] and upsets the relations between the houses [...]”* (77/78).

This facing of hate and ignorance towards them makes both the Creature and Heathcliff feel the wish for revenge. And so their character has no real chance to define itself, to find its

own way to get along with life and with society. “*He has taken on a role, that of a revenger [...]*,” (70) Stevenson describes Heathcliff and later adds, “*Revenge, which dominates Heathcliff’s activity for half the novel, has nothing to do with him [...]*” (70). His life is wasted for emotions, for feelings that maybe did not originally belong to his personal nature. But it is not only hate that makes Heathcliff grow mad.

### ***Origins of Heathcliff’s social failure***

It is also the chaos of love and feelings concerning Catherine Earnshaw that mainly determines Heathcliff’s emotional situation. Stevenson in his essay actually concentrates on this relationship and the immense influence Catherine has on Heathcliff. Considering the incidence that “*they have been close since soon after Heathcliff’s arrival*” (64), Stevenson states that Heathcliff in reality more obeys to Catherine than anybody did to him:

*“Heathcliff, however, always follows a lead that she establishes - he becomes a gentleman to please her, and marries her sister-in-law to aggravate her. Even his revenge-plot [...] is bound up more deeply with his love for her than with any pain independent of their relationship. In a sense, then, we can say something about the origin of Heathcliff’s identity: more than any place else, his self seems to originate in Catherine.”* (72)

She is his origin, Stevenson bravely claims. But is she, Catherine, then also the origin of his mind, his embittered soul? Or was it even his local origin, the streets of Liverpool, that did not make him fit into this higher society right from his arrival. A fact, that as well is drawn into Stevenson’s attention:

*“By transporting the child from the city, where his strangeness is not, as it were, so strange, and placing him in the rural setting of the Heights, Earnshaw introduces into his own apparently stable and stratified society a figure who is doubly alienated from it.*

*Heathcliff is both an outsider, and an outsider in a place specifically unaccustomed to strangers” (67/68).*

Parallel to Heathcliff’s social ignorance, Shelley’s Creature also makes the experience of how it is to feel alienated. Observing that cottage family for several months, getting his education by them and slightly developing the wish for being a member of this society and to leave his orphan status, the Creature finally becomes branded by the rejection of his appearance. It is no longer that perfect society, ideal in human relationships and accepting any other human being only depending on his character. It is even and merely his outer appearance that makes the cottagers treat him so brutally. *“Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me?”* (Shelley, 119), the Creature asks and thus reveals his lacking experience in dealing with human society.

So, both the Creature and Heathcliff somehow feel betrayed by humanity and by their own ideals. Heathcliff even in that way that Catherine - although again and again swearing her love to him - finally marries Edgar Linton. His only social company, his first and only experience of human relations leaves him to marry another man, and - as he feels - to *“love in him [Edgar] what he has not”* (Brontë, 147). He even calls Catherine *“a liar to the end”* (Brontë, 163) after her death. She was his life, his hope, his gate to sociality. Without her Heathcliff feels worthless, lonely and even a kind of mentally death. *“I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul”* (Brontë, 164), he complains. For Stevenson, the frame of Catherine and Heathcliff’s love closes with this line. He calls it *“a statement that is, in effect, his version of ‘I am Heathcliff’”* (63). - How true and how expressive for the meaning of the whole novel! It is a final conclusion about Heathcliff’s origin - and probably a hint that leads us indirectly to his creator(s)...!

## **Works Cited**

**Brontë, Emily.** Wuthering Heights. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1959.

**Shelley, Mary.** Frankenstein. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

**Stevenson, John Allen.** “‘Heathcliff is Me!’: *Wuthering Heights* and the Question of Likeness.” *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Vol. 42, No.1 (1988): 60-81.